

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

What is claimed is:

1. (Currently Amended) A sternum reinforcing device to be used after a sternotomy or a sternal fracture, ~~which said device comprises~~ing:

_____at least an elongated member apt to be used as a unit of a reinforcing group, ~~which said elongated member is being~~ designed to be located on a surface portion of an anterior longitudinal lateral edge of a sternum and is provided with a first and a second connection parts;

_____said connection parts being in the form of arms, wherein a first one of the arms extends in a first direction with respect to a central portion and a second one of the arms extends in a second direction with respect to said central portion, the second direction being opposite to the first direction;

_____said first connection part of said elongated member being adapted to join with a second connection part of a preceding elongated member of the reinforcing group along the longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum;

_____said second connection part of said elongated member being adapted to join with a first connection part of a following elongated member of the group along the same longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum;

_____said elongated member being further provided with a projecting portion designed to be fitted in an intercostal space adjacent to the longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum.

2. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 1, wherein the connection parts of said elongated member are apt to form a prismatic coupling with the corresponding connection parts of the respective preceding and following elongated member of the group.

3. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 1, wherein the elongated member is made from a biocompatible, shaped and bent plate material.

4. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 1, wherein said projecting portion for the intercostal space is a body portion of the elongated member extending between said connection parts and at right angles to them.

5. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 13, wherein said clamping means consists of a stainless steel wire.

6. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 13, wherein said free edges of the U-shaped projecting portion extend from the projecting portion in the form of legs which can be fitted in the intercostal space of the thorax of a patient, laterally to the sternum, and bent in a mutually opposite direction, on the internal side of the thorax.

7. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 6, comprising further a separated splint provided with a multiplicity of slots for the passage and the retaining of said legs before the legs being bent from the body portion in a mutually opposite direction.

8. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 7, wherein said splint is provided, on one side thereof, with guiding notches to accommodate said clamping means.

9. (Previously Presented) The device according to claim 1, wherein said first connection part is a male arm adapted to be fitted slidingly in a corresponding second connection part of a preceding elongated member.

10. (Previously Presented) The device according to claim 9, wherein said male arm has a rectangular flat cross-section profile.

11. (Previously Presented) The device according to claim 1, wherein said second connection part is a female arm adapted to be fitted slidingly in a corresponding first connection part of a following elongated member.

12. (Previously Presented) The device according to claim 11, wherein said female arm has a hollow channel-shaped cross-section.

13. (Previously Presented) The device according to claim 4, wherein said body portion is U-shaped having parallel free edges, orthogonally bent outwards, to enclose between them a clamping means of the elongated member to same sternum.

14. (Withdrawn) A method for reinforcing a sternum after a sternotomy or a sternal fracture, comprising the step of applying a reinforcing group made of a plurality of elongated members, wherein each member is located on a surface portion of an anterior longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum and is provided with a first and a second connection parts, said first connection part of said elongated member joining with a second connection part of a preceding elongated member of the reinforcing group along the longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum, said second connection part of said elongated member joining with a first connection part of a following elongated member of the group along the same longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum, said elongated member being further provided with a projecting portion fitting in an intercostal space adjacent to the longitudinal lateral edge of the sternum.